



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# KNOWLEDGE AND ATTITUDE TOWARDS PUBERTY AND MENSTRUAL HYGIENE AMONG ADOLESCENT GIRLS: A CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDY AMONG IRULA TRIBE (TAMIL NADU)

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### ABSTRACT

Adolescents are a heterogeneous group with diverse needs that vary depending on factors such as age, gender, marital status, place of residence and educational attainment. A healthy adolescence is the corridor to a healthy adulthood. Evidence suggests that adolescents continue to have a variety of unmet needs with reference to reproductive health.

**Objective:** A descriptive, cross-sectional community based study was conducted among 22 adolescent girls situated in Chengalpattu. Knowledge related to puberty, menstruation & menstrual hygiene in the present study.

**Methods:** Qualitative study was used to collect data. In depth interview and focus group discussion was conducted to collect the data. ID guides and FGD guides were used. Ten in depth interviews and two focus group discussion (6 respondents in each group) was conducted.

**Findings:** Respondents were found to be in the age group between 13 yrs-18 yrs and the mean age was 15yrs. majority of the respondent associated menstrual cycle with impure blood, cleaning of body, unhygienic. None of the respondents were aware about the organ that was associated to menstrual bleeding and about the necessary for ovulation and neither were they using sanitary pads. All the respondents were aware of the physical changes that were associated with puberty. Majority (20) of the respondents expressed that their moments within and outside the house. They interaction with the male members of the house was also restricted. Majority of them had absented themselves from going to school due to the distance, lack of washroom and water facilities in the school.

**Conclusion:** Knowledge on puberty, menstruation and menstrual hygiene is very essential for a healthy adulthood. This measure needs to be taken to impart knowledge and also to ensure that conducive environment is provided at school.

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## INTRODUCTION

Menstruation is most important physiological phenomenon that occurs among the girls during the adolescence period. Adolescent girls continue to be one of the vulnerable groups particularly in India where menstruation is still regarded as unhygienic. The menstruation is generally associated with shame, fear, anxiety and depression. Even to this date in India mere mention of the topic has been a taboo. The cultural and social influences appear to be hurdle for advancement of knowledge of the subject. Although menstruation is a natural physiological process it is associated with several misconceptions and practices and the problem of menstrual hygiene is more serious in rural area. This results in adverse health outcomes in these adolescent girls. Awareness about menstruation and hygienic practices followed during

menstruation are of immense importance as it has a health impact in terms of increased vulnerability to reproductive tract infection. Imparting knowledge about menstruation and safe practices during menstruation is necessary to mitigate the suffering of adolescent girls.

### Objective

A descriptive, cross-sectional community based study was conducted among 22 adolescent girls situated in Chengalpattu,. Knowledge related to puberty, menstruation & menstrual hygiene in the present study

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

Qualitative study was used to collect data. In depth interview and focus group discussion was conducted to collect the data. ID guides and FGD guides were used. Ten in depth interviews and two focus group discussion (6 respondents in each group)

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was conducted. The data was transcribed and translated to assist the derivation of codes.

### Ethic Consideration

Rights, anonymity and confidentiality of the respondents were respected in all phases of the study. Informed verbal consent with the respective school's Principal and heads of the tribal community for the respondents who do not attend schools were taken before data collection. Through verbal consent process, the type and purpose of data collection, issues of anonymity and confidentiality; voluntary participation and freedom to discontinue the interview/discussion at any stage; and absence of any known risk or benefit for participating in the study was explained beforehand. Photo and audio records were made with due verbal permission from the respondents. To preserve anonymity, all findings are presented without ascribing names or identifiable personal description.

### Findings

Respondents were found to be in the age group between 13 yrs-18 yrs and the mean age was 15yrs.

### Knowledge on menstrual Cycle

Majority (n=20) of the respondent associated menstrual cycle with impure blood, cleaning of body, unhygienic and impurity.

### Verbatim

ID-R6- "The bad blood from our body goes out, the stomach has lot of bad blood and every month it has to go out".

FD-1-R1- "It is unhealthy time, as impure blood from the body comes out"

### Organ Associated with menstrual bleeding

None of the respondents were aware about the organ that was associated to menstrual bleeding and about the necessary for ovulation and neither were they using sanitary pads. Clothes are used as pads. It is washed and reused. The washed clothes are dried in places where the males donot go. Mostly the clothes are donot get enough sunlight to kill the germs.

### Verbatim

ID- R6- "It is the stomach.. the blood comes from the stomach"

ID-R3- "I am not very sure I think it is the intestine if not the liver.."

FGD-1-R6- "My stomach pains... so I think blood comes from the stomach...that is why I am not able to eat too".

ID- R4- "Girls have lot of impure blood so that is why we menstruate...."

FGD-2-R3- "The body has heated it has to go out... that is why we get the periods..."

### Verbatim

FGD1-R-4- "I feel too shy to ask my mother to buy me sanitary napkin, and even if I buy I donot know how to use it...no one uses it in my community"

FGD1-R-6- "Only rich people can use it... we cannot afford it every month... it is not reusable... so we cannot buy..."

FGD2-R-3- "I have seen it in provisional shops but the shop owner... male is always there... And always someone will be there how can we buy..."

### Physical changes associated with Puberty

All the respondents were aware of the physical changes that were associated with puberty. They were aware of increase in height, enlargement of breast, growth of pubic hair and in arm pit. Hormonal changes and bordering of pelvic bone was not mentioned by the respondents.

### Attitude

They interaction with the male members of the house was also restricted. Majority (n=19) of them had absented themselves from going to school, 10 of them due to the distance, 19 of them due to lack of washroom and water facilities in the school.

### Verbatim

FGD2-R-6-There is no roof for our toilets and there are tall trees around the toilets.... So we never use toilets in school".

FGD-2-5- We cannot use toilets in school... so we avoid coming to school during those days".

ID-4- "I am scared of the odour ... and also about straining my clothes...."

All the respondents expressed that their moments within and outside the house was restricted. They were not allowed to enter temples, touch idols of gods or to participate in any religious ceremonies. They were also deprived of spicy food and non-vegetarian food items.

FGD-1-R5- During those days we cannot go inside the kitchen and we cannot go or touch any idols of gods at home..

FGD-2-R4-I feel so humiliated .... Every one in my house would come to know that I am menstruating as my movements are confined...

FGD-2-R6- We are not allowed to speak to the male members of the house...

FGD-2-R3- My movements are restricted to one corner of the house....

Why all these only for a girl...?

None of the respondents were comfortable with the menstrual cycle. They see this as humiliation and as they are deprived of being themselves, they are unhappy about it. As respondents are isolated they feel this is unhygienic. They expressed that attaining puberty is also seen as age for marriage. So from this period girls are prepared for marriage. 12 of the respondents shared that many of their friends were forced to drop out of school as they were forced to stay at home.

### DISCUSSION

Given the findings in the study and reflecting on the objective of the study, it is clear that attitude of adolescent girls is not healthy towards puberty and menstrual cycle. Knowledge about menstruation that large majority of girls participating in this study had before attaining menarche, and later were from friends. information on menstruation given by friends is often incomplete and incorrect, usually being based on cultural myths, and therefore probably perpetuating negative and distorted perceptions and practices of menstruation (Adinma and Adinma, 2008) it is not surprising that only about twenty seven of the participating girls knew correctly that the menstrual blood came from uterus. This already reflects that teachers do not sufficiently impart the knowledge (Dasgupta and Sarkar, 2008). Movements of girls are restricted during

menstruation. Such restrictions, though varied, are practiced across the groups of different religion and culture – including Hindu, Muslims, Christians and Jews – and in most cases are related to the “impurity” of the females during menstruation (Ten, 2007). Restrictions symbolize a girl’s ritually dangerous status (Narayan *et al.*, 2001) that, as fuelled by myths, misconceptions, superstitions and taboos, is believed to have the potential to spoil food, plant, biological and social processes as exemplified by the respondents of this study

### Suggestions

ANM and ASHA workers working in PHC who work closely with the community can play a major role in imparting the right information on puberty, menstruation and menstrual cycle among the girls and also among female family members. Importance of consuming healthy food during the menstrual cycle and hygiene should be insisted. Efforts should be taken to shift the view of seeing attaining of puberty as getting ready for marriage.

### Conclusion

It is very essential to pay attention in imparting right knowledge and also to generate a healthy attitude towards puberty and menstrual cycle. Lack of this would not only affect the physical health of women but also on their psychological health.

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